

Senator Finds SALT Verification Worries His Constituents

A SALT II agreement would have to be ratified by the Senate to take effect. This is the second of a periodic series on how two senators, John Glenn, D-Ohio, and David Durenberger, R-Minn., prepare for the debate.

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Sen. David Durenberger's Minnesota constituents are worried about Soviet compliance with the terms of a new SALT treaty.

In a poll that Durenberger took of constituents who attended a Carter administration briefing on the nuclear arms limitation treaty being negotiated with the Soviet Union, about two-thirds listed verification as their major concern.

Maintaining parity of nuclear and conventional weapons was one of the chief worries of 56 percent of the respondents. "Linkage" of Russian behavior in such parts of the world as Africa and the Middle East to a SALT agreement was a major concern of 19 percent.

This pattern of concerns was about the same for supporters and opponents of the treaty and for those who were neutral.

Although the poll involves only about 90 Minnesota community and opinion leaders who attended the briefing, the results support a growing belief that verification will be a major element — possibly the major element — in Senate ratification or rejection of the treaty on which the United States and the Soviets are completing negotiations.

"I HAVE THE feeling that verification is the bottom line on the SALT II treaty," Durenberger says. "A lot of people think that the Russians know everything we do but that we know nothing about their secret society. This isn't necessarily true, of course, but we can't tell everything we know about them."

Verification rather than parity or linkage also is the key to ratification for Sen. John Glenn, D-Ohio, who is up for re-election next year.

This emphasis on verification is a concern for SALT II opponents who believe the treaty will have the effect of officially ratifying Russian nuclear arms superiority over the United States.

They are convinced that the Russians are becoming dangerously superior to the United States in nuclear strength. At a Republican leadership conference in February, leading GOP officeholders, including several presidential candidates, passed a resolution that linkage should be a central element in the Senate SALT debate.

SALT OPPONENTS fear that many senators may vote for ratification regardless of the merits of the treaty if they can be convinced that the Soviets can be adequately monitored.

"It disturbs me that verification is the sole issue for some," says Sen. Jake Garn, R-Utah, an avowed opponent. "It assumes that this treaty is OK if it can just be verified. I don't think that's the way to go. It's flawed."

There may be reason for their concern.

"It may be good if ratification does pivot on verification rather than the numbers of weapons," says one senator who publicly supports the treaty. "Opponents like Paul Nitze have aggressively seized the initiative and are making an unacceptable, theoretical worst-case scenario a given political factor. The momentum has moved so far that way that I don't know if we can roll it all the way back."

Sen. Henry Jackson, D-Wash., a hard-liner on national security who is uncommitted on the treaty, concurs at least in part.

"Verification looms large now because equality or parity is so technical," he says. "The administration knows that trusting the Russians is politically the big question. There is deep concern about Russian intentions in the Mideast and Africa, however, and the American people want linkage even though the administration is against it."

DURENBERGER'S SURVEY indicated that 50 percent found the critics' "worst-case" scenario based on a Soviet first-strike unconvincing but at the same time only 53 percent were persuaded by Vice President Walter Mondale's rebuttal.

Generally, however, the administration team enjoyed greater success.

Before their presentation only 31 percent of the respondents favored ratification of SALT II, with about 40 percent undecided because of insufficient information, 8 percent opposed and the rest neutral. Afterwards, 77 percent favored ratification.

Glenn, who for the past two years has held that verification is the key to SALT II, also got some support for his view during a two-way television interview in Columbus, Ohio, during the Easter recess.

He was interviewed on a cable television station on which the subscribers can respond to multiple-choice questions by pushing one of five buttons. The answers go into a computer and are flashed on the screen within a few seconds.

"ABOUT 70 TO 80 percent of the people want a SALT agreement, but then they crisscross when you ask them if they trust the Russians," Glenn says. "We had about 400 people respond on the show and the response was exactly 80-20 on both questions. If we trusted the Soviets we wouldn't be looking at a treaty at this time."

Glenn and Durenberger are following up on their informal surveys. Durenberger has distributed his questionnaire to a group that attended an anti-treaty briefing by Nitze and a retired general, Daniel Graham, and to one that attended a briefing sponsored by the League of Women Voters.

Glenn intends to elaborate on his two-way television session.

"I'm going to structure some lead-up questions such as, 'What do you think of the Soviet arms buildup?' and 'Did you favor the SALT I treaty?' " he says.

Glenn is not impressed by arguments that the SALT treaties have given the Russians a numerical advantage in nuclear arms over the United States.

"WE'VE GONE SO high in the numbers game that we have to put a cap on it and keep the ridiculous from becoming the preposterous," he says. "Even if they knock out all our land-based Minutemen, there's still the submarine force. Even if they have 80 percent accuracy on our Minutemen we still have 200 left with MIRVs that can put 500 to 600 booms on them."

To Glenn the important question about verification is not the numbers of silos and launchers but the qualitative improvements of launchers in terms of throw-weight and MIRV capacity and other factors.

Some skeptics think he's wrong, however.

"This treaty is so full of loopholes such as the lack of definition of what constitutes a launcher or a heavy missile or heavy bomber," says one Capitol Hill staff expert, on the talks. "We think of a launcher as a complex missile system but it could be just a simple piece of metal that props a missile up so that it can be fired electronically. Some mobile missiles can be launched from the vehicles that carry them around."

"THERE'S A LOT of ambiguity in definition of terms, even in what constitutes a mobile missile. For adequate verification we have to have more than just our technical means such as satellites, U-2 overflights and radio telemetry. We need Soviet cooperation on test data on missile testings and the inventory of about 1,000 of their missiles we can't account for."

Durenberger and his fellow Republicans are moving beyond the immediate technical question, however.

"We decided that we were pressing too much on detail so we are having a meeting with (White House National Security Adviser Zbigniew) Brzezinski on the whole scope and direction of U.S. foreign policy," he says. "Then we will go into what assumptions our intelligence is based on. We want to know on a broad scale what we know and understand about the Third World and the culture and mores of countries such as Iran."

"This applies to verification. We want to know what kind of information the president has in making his decisions and we want to put the whole thing in context."

Jackson concurs.

"This will be the biggest debate since the Treaty of Versailles after World War I," he says. "It will be a review of our whole geopolitical situation, including our alliances, the emergence of China and where we are headed from the tip of Africa to the Eurasian land mass."